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SERMON

Preached in

Christ Church, Cork;

On Sunday, April the 15th. 1739.

BEFORE

The Judges of Assize: *R*

By ROBERT Lord Bishop of CORK. *(Clayton)*

Publish'd at the Request of the GRAND - JURY of
the CITY of CORK.



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SEYMOUR

THE

CHURCH OF ST. JOHN

ON THE 14th DAY OF



THE ROBERTA
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To
The Gentlemen of the Grand Jury
OF
The CITY of CORK,

GENTLEMEN,

THAT I may give a publick Testimony of the Readiness with which I shall always be inclined to comply with your Requests, I have sent this Sermon to be

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be Printed without any Alterations :
I shall make no further Apology to
the World for the shortness of it ;
than by informing You, that I was
unwilling to deprive it of that Recom-
mendation from the Press, which I
fear was its most agreeable Quali-
fication in the Pulpit, who am

Gentlemen,

Your

most obedient

humble Serv^t.

ROBERT, CORKE.

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A

S E R M O N

Preached in

Christ Church, Corke, &c.

Jeremiah, 22, 13.

Wo unto him that buildeth his House by unrighteousness, and his Chambers by wrong ; that useth his Neighbours service without wages, and giveth him not for his Work.

TH E Prophet in these Words which I have now read unto you, denounceth the Wo of GOD's Indignation against all Unrighteous dealings with our Neighbour. *Wo*, says he, *unto him that buildeth his house in unrighteousness*, By which Expression, he meaneth no more than if he

he had said, who maketh a Fortune by Unrighteousness ; or as the Prophet *Habakkuk* expresseth it ; *Who gaineth an evil gain to his house.* And by the different expressions of building his House, or of building his Chambers, he intends to denote the greater or lesser degrees of Gain, which any one may make by defrauding or oppressing his Neighbour.

The Prophet *Jeremiah* was sent to the People of *Judah*, a Stubborn and Rebellious People ; to put them in mind of their Duty, and to warn them against all those Evils, which their iniquitous proceedings were likely to bring upon them : And as these things were written for our *Ensample*, I think it very proper at this time, to warn you, my Brethren, against the Practice of these Crimes, which the Prophet declares with a Solemn Wo to be highly offensive in the Eyes of our Creator.

A particular detail of all the various methods of Unrighteous dealing with our Neighbour would be too minute and tedious for our present purpose ; but may be sufficiently supplied, by laying before you some of the principle Points of this kind, wherein People generally offend ; from whence every one of my hearers may make a private application to his particular Circumstances, and by laying his Hand upon his Heart, and appealing to his own Conscience, may be a competent Judge, whether he has offended in this way or not.

And, that I may Imprint what I have to say more effectually upon your Memories, I shall pursue the following method.

First,

First, I shall consider the *general* Evil of Covetousness.

2dly, I shall consider those kinds of Unrighteous Dealings, which may be ranked under the general Name of Oppression.

And lastly, I shall consider the Iniquity of those, who according to the latter part of my Text, *use their Neighbours Service without Wages, and give him not for his Work.*

The first Head, under which I shall consider the Methods of building our House by Unrighteousness, is that of Covetousness. The Original Word which is made use of in the *Greek* Tongue to express *Covetousness*, signifies a desire of having more than one is possessed of at present, and may very easily be conceived to consist in heaping up Wealth, by a Niggardly and Miserly detention of that to which we have a legal right; without any attempt or design of Defrauding our Neighbour. This, however, though it be the least and lowest degree of Evil that is attendant on Covetousness, is very offensive in the Sight of our Creator.

The Desire of having a reasonable Fund for the Support of our Selves and our Family, and of laying up what is sufficient to preserve us and them from Want in Old Age, is prudent and justifiable: And it is moreover very agreeable both to Nature and Reason for Men when they are grown into years, and cannot expect to live much longer themselves, to have a strong inclination for saving Money, in order to
make

make a provision for those Children, which were the Productions of their Youth. When these desires are kept within their due Bounds, and Men are content with making a reasonable and decent Provision for themselves and those who are to succeed them in their Substance, it is then a virtuous and commendable Inclination : But when these desires are indulged to an exorbitant degree, when Men are solicitous about hoarding up Money, of amassing heaps of Wealth, and yet cannot find in their Hearts to dispose of the least portion thereof, to supply the private Necessities of their indigent Neighbours, or perhaps to furnish themselves and their Families with the Comforts or even Conveniencies of Life : Then is the proper End, for which alone Riches are desirable, entirely subverted ; and the more a Man saves, with such dispositions about him, he becomes in reality so much the Poorer. For may not every Man be justly said to be poorer than he was, when his Cares are enlarged, without enlarging his Comforts ? Or indeed, how can any Man be said to be Rich, while he labours under all the inconveniencies of Poverty ? He that will not use his Leggs, is much in the same condition with him who has none to use ; And the Man who is Guardian of Wealth, which he will not allow himself to enjoy, is little better than the Centinel at the Door of a Treasury.

But the misfortune of such a kind of Disposition is, that it seldom stops here. An earnest and vehement desire of having more than we are at present possessed of, naturally inclines Men to pursue all the methods which can be devised for gratifying such an unbounded thirst : And it is seldom that Men, who have any warmth of Temper, and are this way

way inclined, will content themselves with the slow and tedious way of making a Fortune, only by saving and laying up what really belongs unto them : But in order to increase their Wealth, will leave no Method unpractised which their own abilities, their Riches, their Friends, or their station in Life will support them in, to defraud and oppress their Neighbour. And hence arise all the various methods of Iniquity, which Men intent upon growing Rich and Great pursue, in *building their Houses by unrighteousness, and their Chambers by wrong.*

Which leads me to the second Head I proposed to lay before you, which was to consider several of those kinds of unrighteous dealings, which may be ranked under the general Name of *Oppression*.

The natural Constitution of all Society necessarily requires a Subordination of Powers. It is an Observation that has been made some thousands of Years ago, that the Body Politick may be compared to the Body Natural. There must be a Head to direct as well as Hands to work and Feet to walk. There must be Persons, appointed and invested with publick Authority, to direct the disposition of the several parts, and oblige them to perform their various Functions with Regularity and Order. There must be Governors appointed *for the punishment of Evil doers, as well as for the praise of them that do well.* And this is the Foundation of all that Power and Superiority, which one Man claims over another, by the Laws of Society. All Men are by Na-

ture Equal. There is no such thing as one Man having a natural Right of Government over the rest of his fellow Creatures. The greatest Monarch that ever sat upon a Throne, never had any natural Right over the meanest of his Subjects; He has no right but what is given him by the Laws of Society; this is the Foundation of all his Right; and whatever Power he makes use of, that is not to be justify'd by the settled Laws and Rules of Society, is all Usurpation and Tyranny. And whoever he is, that is invested by Publick Authority with any kind or degree of Power, from the highest to the Lowest, from the Prince to the Peasant, if he misapplies that Power, and perverts it to the Prejudice and Detriment of the poorest, the meanest Subject of the Commonwealth, he is, in his way, a Tyrant and an Oppressor.

It is right, that Persons entrusted with the care of Society should by Publick Authority be invested with several Privileges and Immunities, that dignify and distinguish them from the generality of the People: That different degrees of Power should be attended with different degrees of Honour; to the end that Persons invested therewith should be revered and respected accordingly.

It is right, that those who are employ'd in making Laws for the good of the Community, should always be at Liberty and leisure to attend their Charge; and that their minds may be as free as their bodys, it is likewise right, that they should have no avocations to business of less moment; and therefore it ought not to be in the Power of any Person at such times to disturb, or distress them on account of their private

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private affairs. But if any such Men should on the other hand abuse this Liberty, and pervert these Privileges; and instead of employing them for the good of the Community, and the benefit of their Fellow-subjects, should make use of them as a *Skreen* to blind the eyes, or stop the hands of Justice, to support them in oppressing their Neighbours, or to protect themselves from paying their just and lawfull Debts; then *Cursed* be such Immunities, *for they are fierce*, and such Privileges *for they are Cruel*.

Nor is Oppression and Tyranny confined only to the higher Stations in the Commonwealth; but, according to the Temper and Disposition of the Person entrusted with Power, gradually descend to the lowest Offices of the State. Many there are, I make no doubt, in their several Stations, who endeavour to employ that Power, with which they are invested by the Commonwealth, for it's real service and advantage, in distributing Justice, relieving the Oppressed, and being a Father to the Fatherless. But some I fear there are who pervert it to the contrary ends; to enable them to Domineer and Tyrannize over their Tenants, and their Neighbours; *to grind the faces of the Poor*, and to make themselves a Terroure and Plague to all that are round about them. *Wo unto them*, says the Prophet Micah, *that devise Iniquity and work evil upon their beds : When the Morning is light they practise it, because it is in the power of their hands. And they covet Fields and take them by Violence, and houses, and take them away : So they oppress a Man and his house, even a Man and his heritage. Wo unto them*, says the Prophet Isaiah, *that are mighty to drink wine, and Men of strengtb*
to

to mingle strong drink : Which Justify the wicked for reward, and take away the Righteousness of the Righteous from him.

Nor is Oppression only to be found among Men of fortune and figure in their Country, but also among the meanest and lowest of the People. The sword of Power is a terrible instrument in the hands of an unmercifull Man; and when Persons bred in low life are entrusted therewith, they too frequently use it with the utmost severity. There are some offices in every State, which cannot well be executed by any but Persons of the lowest rank : And as such have not many opportunities of building their Chambers by wrong, they generally make use of their time; and as they are urged on by Necessity, so are they unrestrained by shame, from stooping to the lowest and basest kinds of Oppression. The rich Tyrant too often reaps the benefit of the poor Man's labour, and shares the produce of his neighbour's Field; but the Tyrant in low life, raketh the very ground, he *taketh the Harvest out of the thorns*, and leaveth not behind the gleanings of the Stubble. *Salomon* makes use of a strong Image to represent the destructive virulence of this low kind of Tyranny; *When the poor oppresseth the poor, it is*, says he, *like a sweeping rain that leaveth no food*. It sweeps clean, and leaveth nothing behind, except the marks of its own violence and Desolation.

Nor do Men become Oppressors of their follow-subjects by the help of legal Authority only, but sometimes without it, nay even in direct opposition to it : When they are supported

supported by their Riches, or their friends, to break through the boundrys of the Laws, or at least to evade and elude them. Rich Men have been often compared to Mountains; which collect the dews of Heaven in their secret Reservoirs, to disperse them in Springs, and fountains, and winding Rivers on the lower Vales : So the Rich Man's wealth when let forth in due proportion and proper Seasons, furnishes the Poor with Plenty, filleth the Hungry with good things, and sendeth the Industrious satisfy'd away. But when Riches on the contrary light into the hands of Purse-proud, Litigious, ill designing Men, they too often burst forth in floods of Violence and Oppression ; and when let out of their Caverns, for such purposes, become like a sweeping rain, that bears down all before it.

The influence that money has over corrupt minds is an observation as old as the Days of the son of *Sirach*, who advises people to be very cautious of offending a Rich Man.

" For, *says he*, as the matter of the fire is, so it burneth :
 " And as a Man's strength is, so is his wrath; and accord-
 " ing to his riches his anger riseth, and the stronger they are
 " which contend, the more they will be inflamed. *And in*
other places he says, " Be not at variance with a rich Man
 " least he overweigh thee ; for Gold hath destroyed many,
 " and perverted the hearts of Kings. Burthen not thy self
 " above thy power while thou livest, and have no fellow-
 " ship with one that is mightier and richer than thy self :
 " For how agree the Kettle and the earthen Pot together ?
 " for if the one be smitten against the other, it shall be
 " broken

" broken. The Rich Man hath done wrong, and yet he
 " threatneth withal; the poor Man is wronged, but he must
 " intreat. A rich Man, *says he*, beginning to fall is upheld
 " of his friends; but a poor Man being down is thrust a-
 " way. When a rich Man is fallen; he hath many helpers:
 " He speaketh things not to be spoken, and yet Men justify
 " him : The poor Man slipped and they rebuked him, he
 " spoke wisely, but could have no place. When a rich
 " Man speaketh, every Man holdeth his tongue, and look
 " what he saith, they extol it to the clouds; but if the poor
 " Man speak, they say what fellow is this? and if he
 " stumble they will help to overthrow him. This is a
 frightfull picture of human nature, but a very true one; so
 true, that it has retained the justness of it's similitude from
 the days of *Sirach* to this very day.

It is a melancholy thing to reflect on the numberless scenes
 of Oppression, that are daily acted by Knots, by Clans, by
 Clubs of Men united together; under the pretence of sup-
 porting their Friends, and preserving an Interest. This may
 be friendship according to their sentiments, but it is in reality
 the friendship of Highway-Men, the Friendship of a Gang
 of Robbers. Whether it is equally dishonourable or no,
 I need not say; but sure I am it is equally dishonest.

Nor is it only by the Assistance of Friends, or of Riches,
 or of Mens Station in Life, that they are enabled to injure
 or oppress one another; but, as Society cannot subsist without
 Traffick and Commerce, it frequently happens that Men in
 their mutual Dealings have opportunities of oppressing each
 other

other. And whoever he is that layeth hold of these opportunities, and taketh advantage of his Neighbours necessity, either to raise the value of his Goods, to an exorbitant price; or to demand too high an Interest for the loan of Money, which is Properly called Usury; Or to oblige his neighbour to part with his Goods at an under-rate; *He buildeth his house by unrighteousness and his chambers by wrong.*

Among the laws which God gave to the Jews, there were several very express ones against these kinds of Crimes; and this is what is meant by the Command given in the 25 Chap. of *Leviticus* where it is said, *If thou sellest ought unto thy neighbour or buyest ought of thy neighbour's hand; Ye shall not oppress one another.* And in the number of Crimes for which the Prophet *Ezekiel* denounceth the Judgements of God against the People of *Jerusalem*, he reckons up these of Usury and Extortion. For, says he, *because thou hast taken Usury, and Increase, and thou hast greedily gained of thy neighbours by Extortion, and hast forgotten me, says the Lord God, therefore I have smitten mine hand at the dishonest gain which thou hast made.*

I come now in the last place to consider those who, according to my Text, *use their neighbours service without wages and give him not for his work.*

This kind of Iniquity, against which *Wo* is denounced in the words of my Text, though it be too common, is yet of a very heinous nature. And I take this opportunity of declaring it as my fixed opinion, that of all the various ways
of

of unrighteous dealing with our Neighbour; there is not any one, Murder only excepted, that is more offensive in the sight of our Creator, or will meet with severer degrees of punishment in another world, than this of not paying our just debts to those Persons whose Goods, or whose Industry, we have apply'd to our own service. Let us consider that most of those who live by their Industry are generally poor and needy; their daily gain furnishes them with daily bread; and he who robs them of it, or even detains it from them, frequently sends them and their numerous family hungry to their beds. Can any thing in nature be more unjust and more Cruel than that some Persons should, live in affluence and plenty, be *cloathed with purple and fine linnen, and fare sumptuously every day*; while those poor tradesmen, whose goods they wear, or whose meat they devour, are hungry and thirsty, their soul fainting in them, trying in vain to stop the cries of their children, whose bowels yearn for Food? How often in these circumstances do poor Parents prefer Death to such a State of uneasiness, and beg of the Grave to swallow them up alive?

Nor is it only the Tradesman who suffers under this kind of Oppression, but also the Labourer and the Tenant.

How many Landlords are there, who already abound with all the Superfluities of Life, who oppress their Tenants, keep them Poor and Hungry, and Naked, while they themselves Riot in Drunkenness and Luxury, purchased with the produce of those poor Men's Labour?

If

If Almighty God could be so Compassionate even to the Beasts of the Field, as to give particular Directions, that the Mouth of the Ox which treadeth out the Corn should not be Muzzled, can we imagine he will be less regardful of the treatment we give to the Creatures of our own Species? No! for in the foregoing Chapter Moses expressly says, *Thou shalt not oppress the hired Servant that is poor and needy. At his day you shall give him his hire, neither shall the Sun go down upon it; For he is Poor, and setteth his heart upon it; lest he cry against thee unto the Lord, and it be Sin unto thee.*

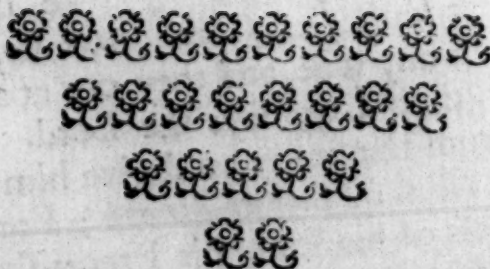
The Tradesman and the Tenant have so great a dependence on the good will of their Customer and Landlord, that they must be grievously oppressed before they will cry out; and when they do cry out, their Poverty often keeps them from being able to obtain redress, so that when they are oppressed, they must lie down under their oppression: and for this reason among others, no doubt it is, that Almighty God has taken the Cause of the poor and needy in a particular manner upon himself; and has declared that he will always listen to their Complaints. “Ye shall not afflict any Widow or Fatherless Child, *says Moses*; For if thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me: I will surely hear their Cry, *says the Lord*. Turn not away thine Eye from the needy, and give him no occasion to curse thee, *says the wise Son of Sirach*; For if he curse thee in the bitterness of his Soul, his Prayer shall be heard of him that made him.” I think I cannot conclude this Discourse better than with the Advice of the Wise Solomon, “Rob not the Poor, *says he*, because he is poor, neither op-

“ press the afflicted in the Gate, for the Lord will plead
“ their Cause, and spoil the Soul of those that spoiled them.”

Consider therefore what has been said, and that it may
have its due Effect on your Lives and Conversations, the
Lord of his infinite Mercy grant, to whom be ascribed all
Honour, Glory, Might, Majesty, and Dominion, both now,
henceforth, and for evermore.



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